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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000897

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: MOSQUE RAZED, PARAMILITARIES TRAINED

Classified By: CDA, a.i.: RON MCMULLEN FOR REASON 1.5(D)

1. (C) Trouble in Sittwe: Local officials on July 22 reportedly tore down a mosque in Sittwe, 70 miles SE of the Bangladeshi border, and arrested seven Muslims, one of whom subsequently died in custody. This information came to us from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and UN contacts. Apparently the mosque's leadership made unauthorized improvements to the structure, resulting in the decision by local authorities to tear down the whole building. Buddhist monks and Muslim shopkeepers also clashed on July 18 in Pyinmana, a small town between Mandalay and Rangoon, according to local media reports.

2. (SBU) Paramilitary training: A trusted Burmese contact claims the USDA-affiliated "Power Ranger" militia is receiving rudimentary riot-control and military training in central Burma and elsewhere. "They are being told their mission is to hold up any attacking Americans long enough for Russia and China to come to the rescue," he explained. Chuckling, he added, "The Russians--that's a good one." Media reports also claim the GOB is training a paramilitary "Peoples Militia" in Arakan State to assist in putting down any general uprising.

3. (C) Comment: Muslim-Buddhist troubles have periodically flared up in Sittwe and elsewhere. We frequently hear stories of pro-SPDC "fake monks" allegedly inciting violence against Muslims to deflect anti-regime ire. This does not seem to be the case in these latest incidents, and, with the political temperature in Burma quite high, any incident could quickly get out of hand. A leader of the student rebellion of 1988 told us recently that he thinks there will be substantial bloodshed in Burma before year's end. Perhaps the training of various paramilitary groups indicates the generals share this view. End Comment.
McMullen